SECTION V

PEDALLING AND THE ELEMENT OF DURATION

We will now pass on to another matter which is disgracefully neglected by the average teacher and pianist. I refer to the properly directed use of the Damper Pedal.

Just as close attention required for foot as for finger.

This neglect no doubt arises in the first instance from a totally wrong outlook as regards the Piano itself. Those who thus misuse or neglect the Pedal evidently consider "Pedalling" to be something apart, separate and distinct from Piano-playing itself, instead of recognising the fact that Piano-playing can only be successfully accomplished, provided we superintend the doings of our right foot just as minutely — and constantly — as we must the doings of our fingers at the keyboard.

Most pedalling a mass of blemishes.

It is indeed no exaggeration to say that most of the pedalling one hears, even from advanced players (aye, even from concert-pianists) is just about as bad as are the smears and blotches which a child makes in its first attempts to paint a picture. While we are still mere babies, most of us, however, have sufficient sense to feel deeply disgusted, mortified and humiliated, when we see the colour-messes which result from our well-meant, hard striving to make "a pretty picture."

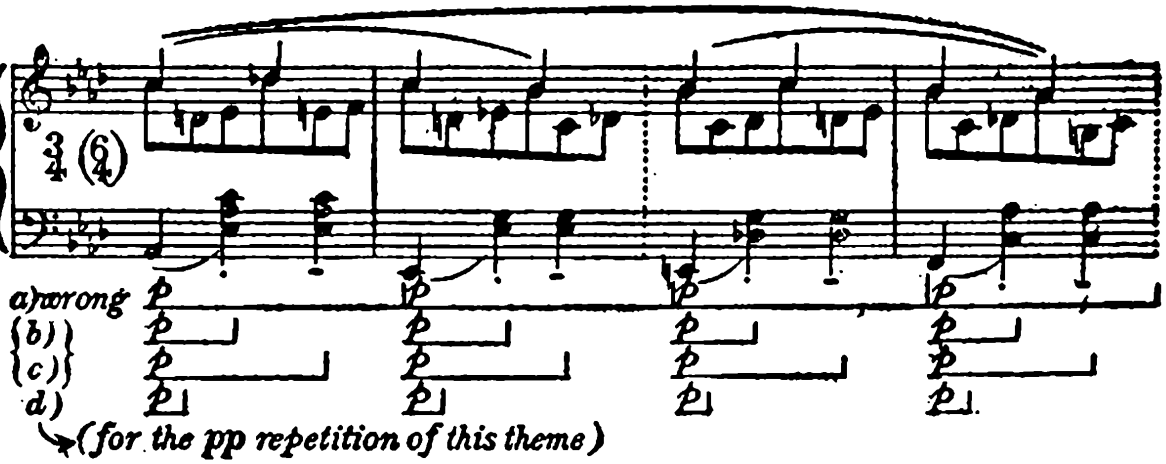
Nevertheless, here at the Piano, we have fully grown-up people, sometimes even quite musically gifted, who in spite of all this, quite cheerfully misuse their piano exactly as these children do their brush, and make a very *quagmire* of sound, and notice nothing amiss — such is the force of habit.

I have repeated passages to artist-pupils and concert-players, pedalled precisely as *they* have pedalled them — with every vestige of phrasing completely wiped out by the pedal, in spite of a beautiful display of rising hands, etc.; and it has been difficult to make them believe they could have shown themselves so unmusical.[1]

Examples of bad and good pedalling.

For instance, I have heard them pedal the A flat Waltz of Chopin (Op. 42) thus (see *a*, Exp. 74), instead of doing so properly in one of the alternate ways (see *b*, *c*, and *d*, Exp. 74):

EXAMPLE 74.
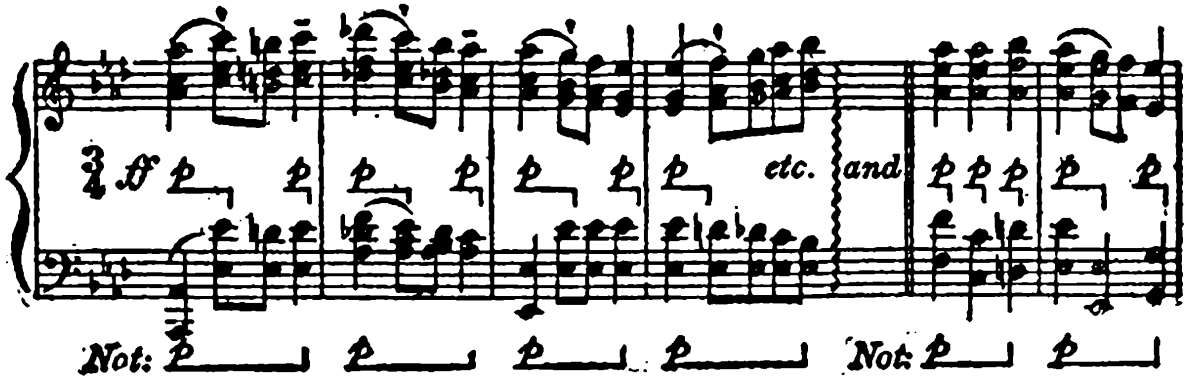


Not enough to *feel* the breaks between the phrasings clearly, one must *play* them clearly.

[1] As in speech, so also in Music, phrasing *always implies a break in the continuity of the legato.* You must have commas, etc., in your speech, and you must provide them also at the piano as a breaking of sound-continuity, else your performance will sound like "Flora Finching's" speeches in "Little Dorrit." Many players quite forget this necessity, and mistakenly fancy their phrases to be quite well defined, while all the time they are connecting each new phrase to each preceding one in an unbroken continuity of legato, either by a careless finger, or more often by a careless foot — to the complete obliteration of their phrasing. I have even had such argue with me, that their phrases *must* be "quite clear" (in spite of such non-phrasing) because they themselves "*feel* it quite clearly" — as if the mere fact of realising or feeling a thing sufficed for its expression to others!

Or we hear them pedal a passage with unbroken *legato*, instead of giving life-giving contrasts to it as in Examples 75 and 76, thus:[1]

From Carnival (Finale). Schumann.

EXAMPLE 75.



[1] A mistake very often made even by advanced players is to continue holding the Pedal far too much, thus making an unbroken *legato* in place of that ever changing and contrasting variety of Duration required by most music. They hold the Pedal wherever and whenever it can be held without producing actual harmonic cacophony, instead of being guided in its use by the ever-changing and exact duration-needs of each note. **Inadequacy of Pedal-discontinuity.**

The wrong outlook is: "can I *hold* the pedal here?" Whereas the right one is: "can I *omit* it here?"

Strict attention to the duration-needs of every note demonstrates how surprisingly often one may and should omit or cut short the Pedal, to the betterment of the piece.

How pathetic is it, for instance, to hear a concert-player giving a piece, intended to be light and gossamer-like, with delightful lightness and brilliancy of touch, and meanwhile totally ruining the effect of it, and making it sound dull and heavy owing merely to a carelessly *continuous legato* given to all the underlying harmonies and basses!

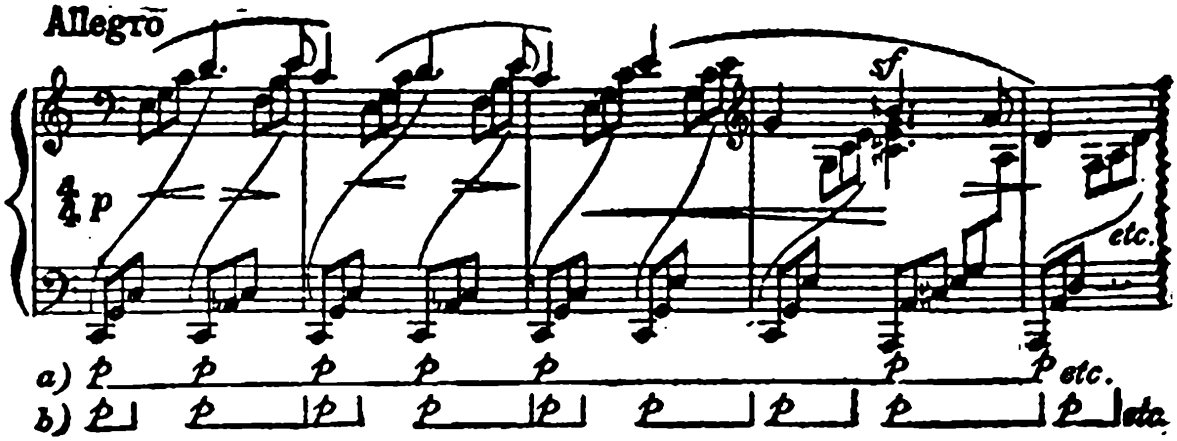
Realise, that a gossamer curtain or piece of lace seems "light" to our eyes simply because of the spaces in its texture — the light-*silences* in it; and that lightness in musical effect is similarly wrought by the *lapses* in sound-continuity given to the texture of the music.

As examples play Chopin's two studies in G flat, and those in F minor and F major, and pedal the bass first in unbroken *legato*, and then again with as many air-spaces as possible in the harmonies and basses, and realise how infinitely greater is the effectiveness and beauty thus obtained.

See Note, page 137.

From Concertstück. Schumann.

EXAMPLE 76.

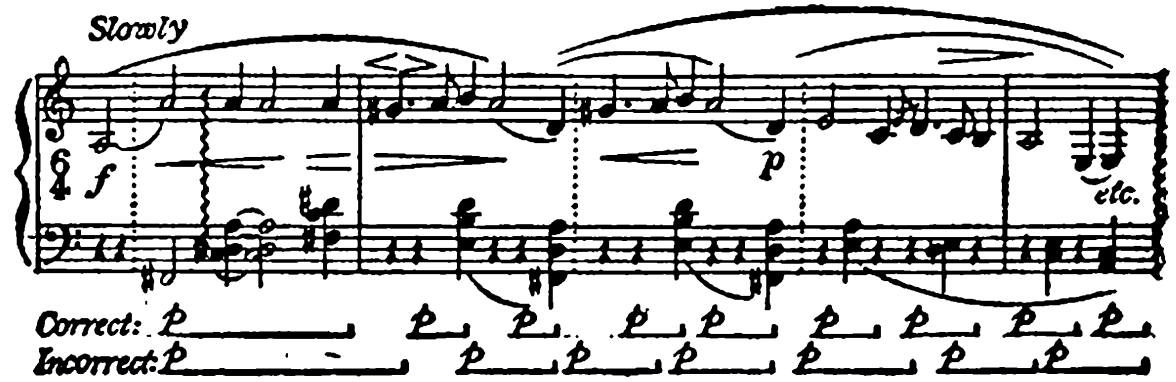


(*a*) *Legato*, incorrect. (*b*) *Varied*, correct.

Or again, we hear what should be detached chords, *draggled* along by the pedal, thus:

From "Moods of a Moment,"[1] No. 2. Tobias Matthay.

EXAMPLE 77.



No doubt, the fault is often due to the fact that even the best of us do so often allow ourselves to play *without really listening to the actual sounds emanating from the instrument*, although our musical intentions may be keen enough.

As I have already said here, a very great deal of unmusical playing arises purely from this very fact; for we may be *meaning* things, musically, quite meritoriously, but they cannot "arrive" unless we take the very simple and common-sense precaution to listen accurately *to what we are doing*;

[1] By permission of Messrs. Ascherberg & Co.

and this applies with redoubled force when it is a question of DURATION.[1]

Accuracy in duration depends immediately upon accuracy in listening.

Unless we have our minds constantly fixed (through our physical ears) upon the actual sounds emanating from the Piano, we have no inducement to let go either the keys or the Pedal — or to put this down.[2] A simple cure for inattentive pedalling is often found, in merely insisting on the passage or whole piece, thus mispedalled, being carefully played through *without any pedal whatever;* close attention to the actual sounds being insisted upon in the meantime. It often proves to be a most startling revelation to the would-be player, when he thus discovers that till then he had been playing practically without really listening in the least to the actual *duration* of the notes played!

Value of duration contrasts insufficiently realised.

Indeed, far too little attention is given to the whole question of *duration.* No one has pleaded more vehemently than I have for close attention to the inexorable need for Tone-variety — whether of quality and quantity; but while we are thus attending to this particular requirement, vital as it is, do not let us in the meantime forget the vast contrasts of Expression to be found in contrasts of mere Duration — contrasts extending in compass from the sharpest *staccotissimo* up to the fullest *legato* or *tenuto,* and not only thus far, but further; for the contrasts to be obtained from varying degrees of *legatissimo* (or the overlapping of sounds) are indeed not the least important of this wonderful element of Duration.[3]

[1] Remember what I have said *re* "Listening," pp. 5 and 128–9, etc.

[2] How dismally dry is a singing passage when the pedal is *not* used as it should be, almost for each note!

[3] A good Scarlatti Technique, for instance (in the modern playing of him), depends greatly upon a full appreciation of the required nicety in Duration-values, just as a Chopin Technique so greatly depends on Tone-values, and nicety of Rubato-inflections — and Pedalling.

Gradations of tone and duration contrasted.

Let us now try the effect of a simple succession of sounds, first given with gradations of Tone-quantity only, and secondly, with gradations of Duration only:

EXAMPLE 78*a*.



EXAMPLE 78*b*.



Notice, that this last example is given without the aid of any Pedalling. As an example of the application of this principle of Duration, see the slow movement from Beethoven's Sonata in G, Op. 14, where we have such contrasts beautifully applied and particularly noted by the master himself; notice the carefully planned sequence of the contrasts:

(The lecturer here played the second movement of this little Sonata, so simple and yet so full of delicate charm when adequately performed.)

EXAMPLE 79.



Really, when one sees how often it is quite overlooked, one feels inclined to assert that variety of Duration is even of greater importance than variety of Tone itself! Again, the effects of Foot-duration are even more striking than those of Finger-duration. The sustaining and *mellowing* of notes by means of the Pedal is an iridescence hardly ever absent in a modern composition.[1] This enhancement of

Pedal-duration more important than finger-duration.

[1] *See* note as to Chopin's pedalling, p. 89, *Note*.

the Duration-contrasts by the Pedal, however, is *not* owing solely to the greater *resonance* thus obtained, as you might at first suppose. . . . True, a somewhat greater resonance does result when the Pedal is depressed, and for this reason: that when we sound a note with all the dampers raised by the pedal, the sympathetically-inclined higher strings are roused into action, while the lower ones in addition give the sounded note as a harmonic. Listen to the effect of a chord played without pedal, and then with pedal:

(The lecturer here illustrated this point.)

Pedal enhances actual prolongation of sounds.

The fact of more strings vibrating in sympathy with those sounded does therefore certainly contribute to a greater resonance, but besides this it also contributes to an actual *prolongation* of the sounds, and consequent richness in the Singing effects. Moreover, when a legato is evolved solely by the fingers, it is mostly a case of Legato or Legatissimo *between single notes*, whereas with the pedal *any number of notes* can be thus rendered legato or legatissimo.

Although I have noted some of the details of Pedalling in the last chapter of my "Relaxation Studies"[1] I must nevertheless glance at some of the chief points here:

"Syncopated" pedalling.

I think it may be taken for granted, that even the most primitive and antediluvian of teachers have now at least some hazy sort of notion as to the nature and importance of "syncopated" pedalling. The reason of this requirement of course lies in the fact, that if you hold a key down by the finger, and then connect that finger (in legato) to the next note you play, a bad smudge will result if you put the pedal down at *the same instant* that you depress that next key. For, in a finger passage, you will necessarily be holding up the damper of the first note with one finger,

[1] "Relaxation Studies," (Bosworth & Co.).

Why it is required.

until the very moment when you sound the next note with the next finger; therefore, if the pedal is made to raise *all* the dampers at that very moment, this will prevent the previous note's damper from descending and cutting off the tone, hence the smudge and cacophony.

For example, play a simple scale in both hands, quite slowly and legato, and depress the pedal for each note at the same moment *with* the descending keys, and the whole passage is badly smudged.

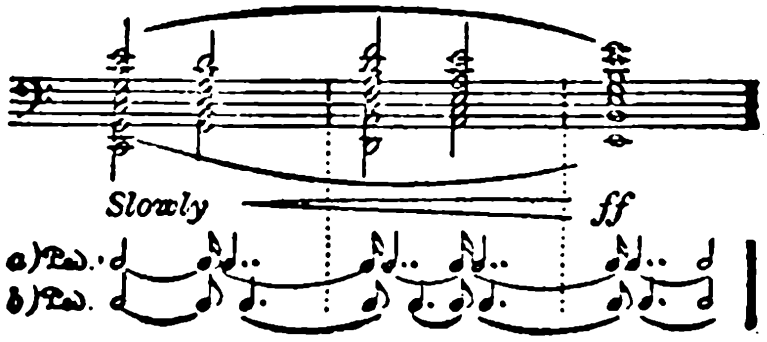
(Illustrated.)

Whereas, if you pedal properly (with the pedal moving down *after* the sounding of the notes, and going up *at* the sounding of the next ones) you obtain a perfectly clean legato.

(Illustrated.)

You see therefore, that in all *legato* passages, the pedal must *rise* as the next legato-note *goes down* — that is, unless the two sounds bear sounding together. In short, the *dampers* must reach the *strings* of the notes *to be* damped, *at the very moment* that the *hammers* reach the *next* notes. That is, the Pedal goes *up* as the *next* finger goes *down*. Now let us hear a chord-progression rendered Legato, solely by *foot-duration*. I will choose the very simplest progression, see A, Exp. 80: —

EXAMPLE 80.



But in addition to this unbroken legato we may have considerable gradations of Duration *beyond* legato, that is, gradations of Legatissimo — or an overlapping of the sounds, see B, Exp. 80.

Legatissimo pedalling.

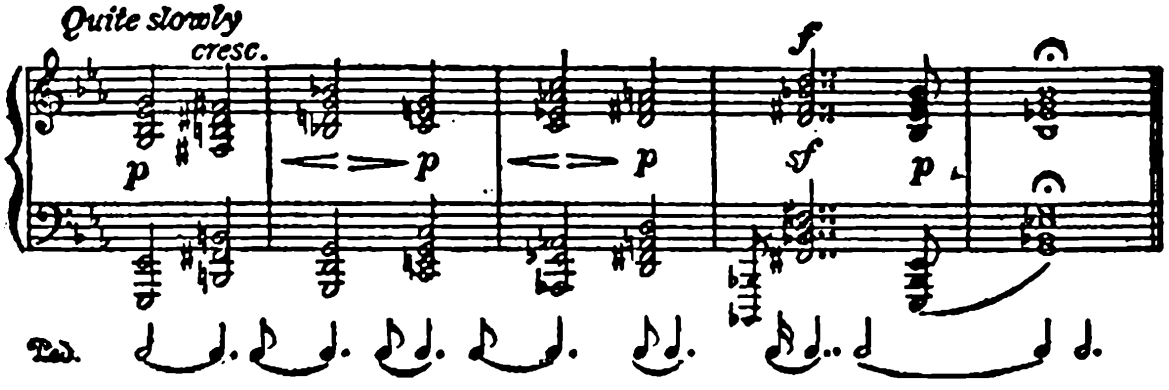
In a large room or hall, the resonance or echo always causes a more or less faint or incipient legato or legatissimo. But the difference in pedal-effect is even then quite marked — for the ear distinguishes between the resonance of the room and the resonance of the Piano. Let me play both effects once again, and you will realise the contrasts better:

Echo-resonance of a hall is distinct from pedal continuity.

(Illustration repeated.)

To ensure your realising how this legatissimo effect is produced, and what enormous control it gives us over sound-effect, I will now so exaggerate this "overlapping" that you can hear the pedal *stop* the previous chord *considerably after* the appearance of the next one — and thus of course producing a slight cacophony for the moment:

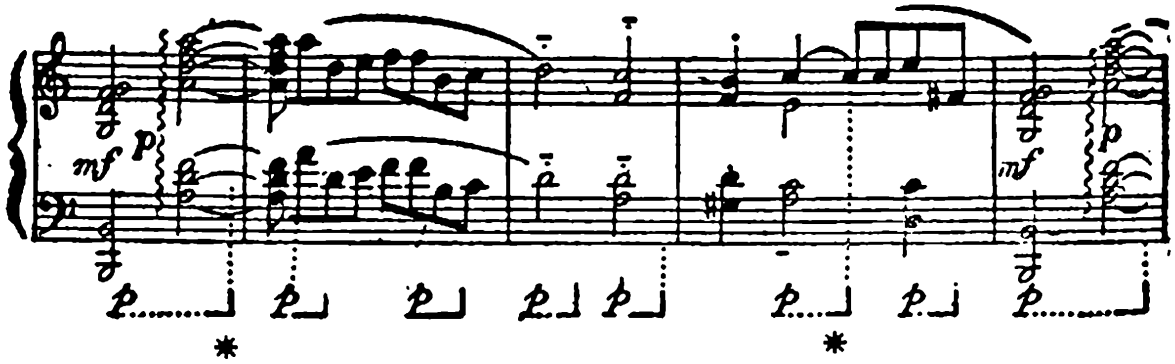
EXAMPLE 81.



Numberless examples might be quoted of such "overlapping" effects, even extreme ones, but I will select one only — and a very beautiful one — from Schumann's Concertstück in G; I have shown the place by an asterisk: —
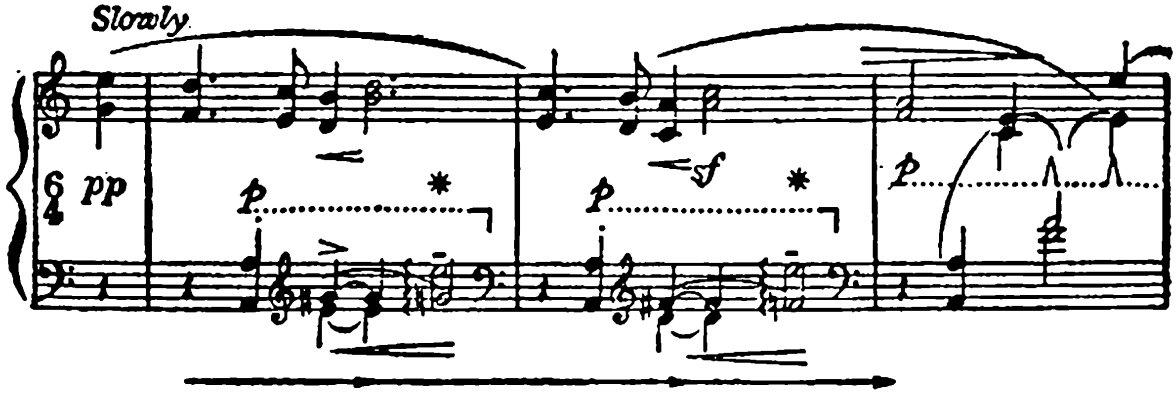
Examples of legatissimo pedalling.

EXAMPLE 82.



And as an example of that rarer effect, the *extreme* overlapping, I quote a few bars from my own "Moods of a Moment," No. 2: —

EXAMPLE 83.[1]



Pedal must rise fully.

In teaching these up-goings of the pedal, be most careful to insist that the pedal is always allowed to rise sufficiently, *fully* to damp the intended sounds, otherwise they will continue to sound in spite of the pedal having moved up — satisfactorily to the foot, but not to the ear, thus: —

(The lecturer illustrated this.)

Pedal must remain up long enough.

Also insist on your pupil allowing the pedal to remain up *long enough* to stop the vibrations of *all* the strings — including the lower and more powerful ones, else unwittingly, a so-called "half-damping" effect will result. This means

[1] By permission of Messrs. Ascherberg & Co.

that the lower strings of the instrument will continue to sound (will remain un-damped) while the upper ones are silenced.

(Illustrated.)

Sometimes, however, it happens that this "half-damping" (or rather, "half-pedalling") effect is actually required. It is required somewhat frequently, not only in modern music, but also in the older masters. Now remember, when you do require such "half-damping," it is obtained by *purposely* giving the otherwise faulty action of the pedal-foot which I have just been warning you against. That is, you must *not* here leave the pedal up long enough to kill all the previous sounds; to obtain "half-pedalling" effects, the pedal must be allowed to jump up only for an instant, and while this momentary touching of the strings is sufficient to stop the sounding of the *higher* strings, it hardly affects the lower ones at all, and we are thus enabled to play changing harmonies in the upper registers of the instrument, while retaining the sound of a low bass note, etc.[1]

Half-damping effects.

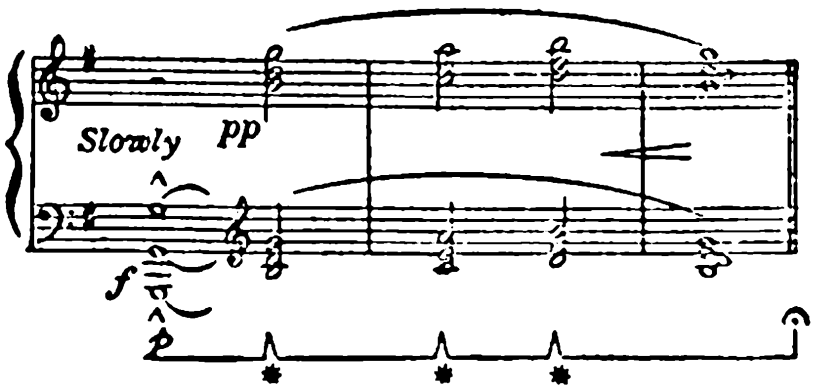
Let me give you a simple example, where a bass is held through such changes of harmonies:[2]

[1] The so-called *sostenente* pedal allows such sustaining of any note or notes, while not affecting the other portions of the keyboard. This pedal is used exactly as in the process of ordinary "syncopated" pedalling. The device has been applied by several makers; it is of course an extra expense in manufacture, which fact no doubt sufficiently accounts for its not being adopted generally; also, it is inclined to make the touch of the instrument a little more clumsy and uneven for the time being — that is, while this pedal is held down. Musically, however, there would be a distinct advantage in having it on all pianos.

The "Sostenente" pedal.

[2] A familiar example is found in the well-known Rachmaninoff Prelude.

EXAMPLE 84.

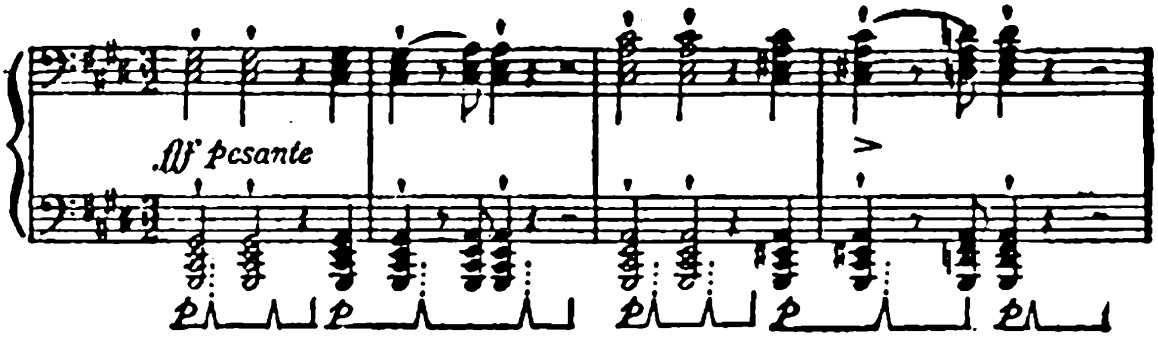


The _∧_∧_ mark in the Pedal line is meant to suggest the momentary rising action of the foot in those places — the "half-damping" effect.

Half-pedalling applied to whole chords.

Whole chords, low down, may also be somewhat similarly "half-damped;" only a small remainder of the full sustaining power being thus left after a strong percussion. It is rather a striking effect, but only rarely applicable. Liszt's Sonata in B minor offers us a striking instance:

EXAMPLE 85.

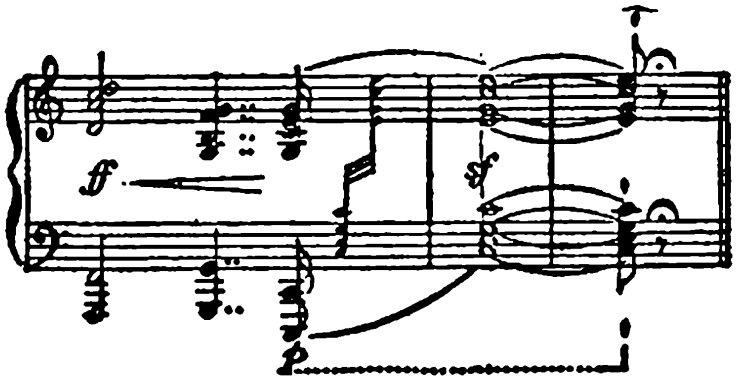


Cessation of sound as a form of emphasis.

Another point as to Duration, which I find is so often overlooked both by players and teachers, is the fact that we can produce an actual *emphasis* by making a large body of sound *cease* accurately and sharply on a beat or pulse. I mean, that we can call attention to a pulse-place (and thus give it emphasis) if, after sounding and holding a strong chord with the pedal, we release it quite suddenly, and

precisely *on such pulse*. Take for instance, a final chord thus:

EXAMPLE 86.



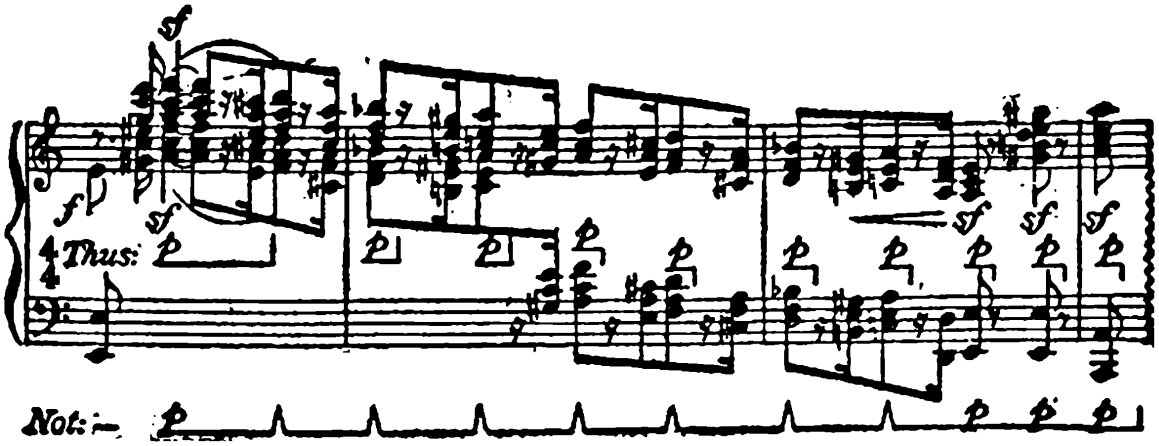
We also employ this device of detachment as a form of emphasis in ordinary speech at times, when we wish to be particularly assertive; for instance, instead of gliding over the phrase "Now⌒mind⌒you⌒do⌒this⌒" we ejaculate: "Now! mind — you — do — this!" . . . We do not *legato* the ejaculation "Lookoutacariscoming," but we emphasise it by a staccato "Look-out!" from the rest of the shriek.[1]

To show you how passages can be enhanced in their emphasis by such cutting short of the note-durations, I will give you the first entries of the Solo Piano in several of the Concertos — passages meant to be as emphatic and assertive as possible. I will first play them Pedal-*legato*, and you will see how ineffective they are thus, and I will then play them with the proper detached emphasis — by judicious raising of the Pedal, thus:

[1] Mozart said, "Silence is the greatest effect in Music." Indeed, he well knew the value not only of Duration-varieties, but the value of *rests*. We, now-a-days, hardly ever have the courage to wait a bar or two in complete, striking silence, to enable the ear to look forward to the next sound!

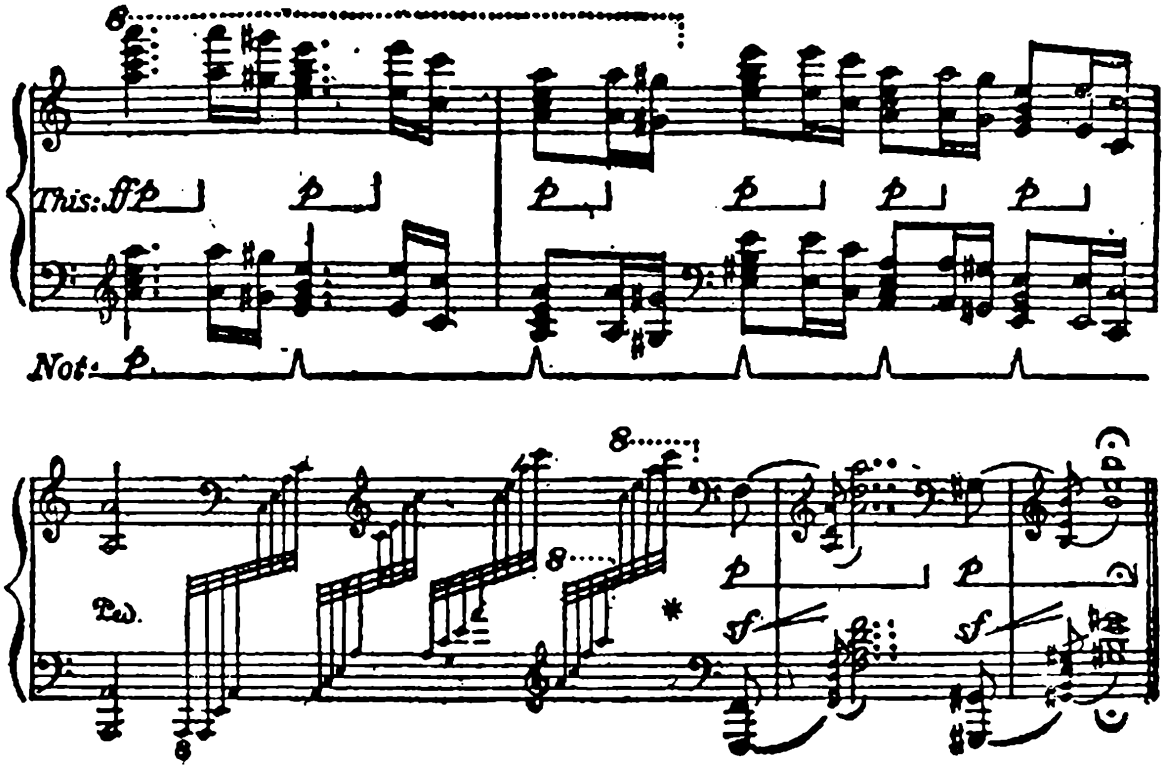
From Schumann's Concerto.

EXAMPLE 87.



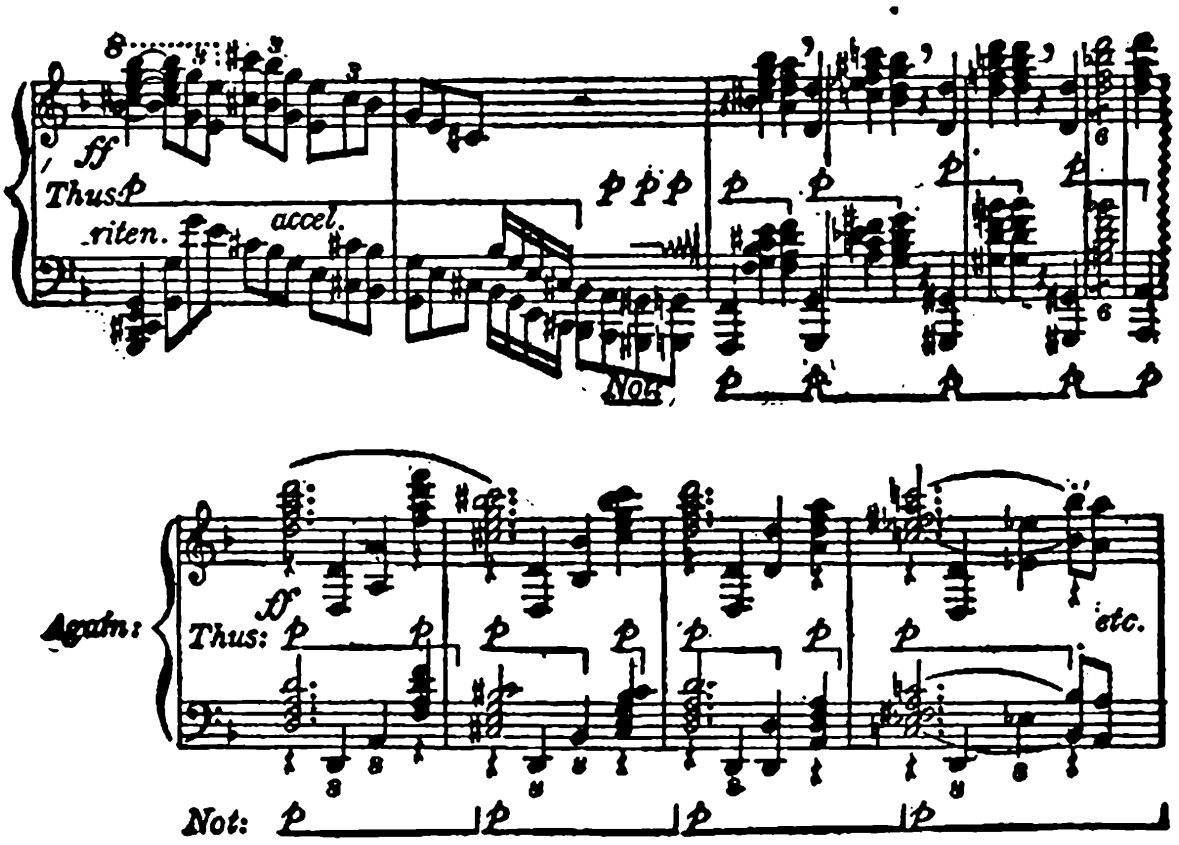
From Grieg's Concerto.

EXAMPLE 88.



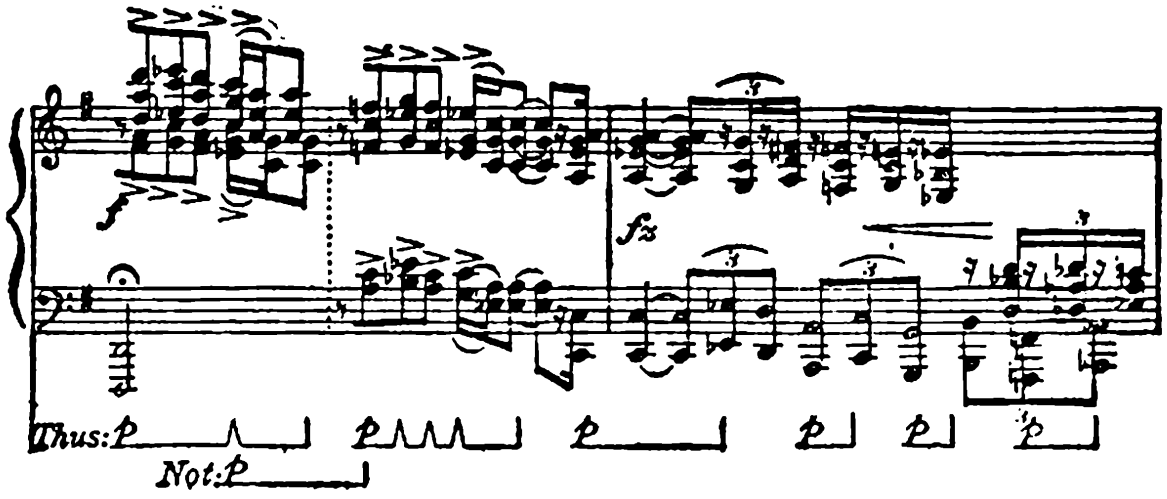
From Rubinstein's D minor Concerto.

EXAMPLE 89.

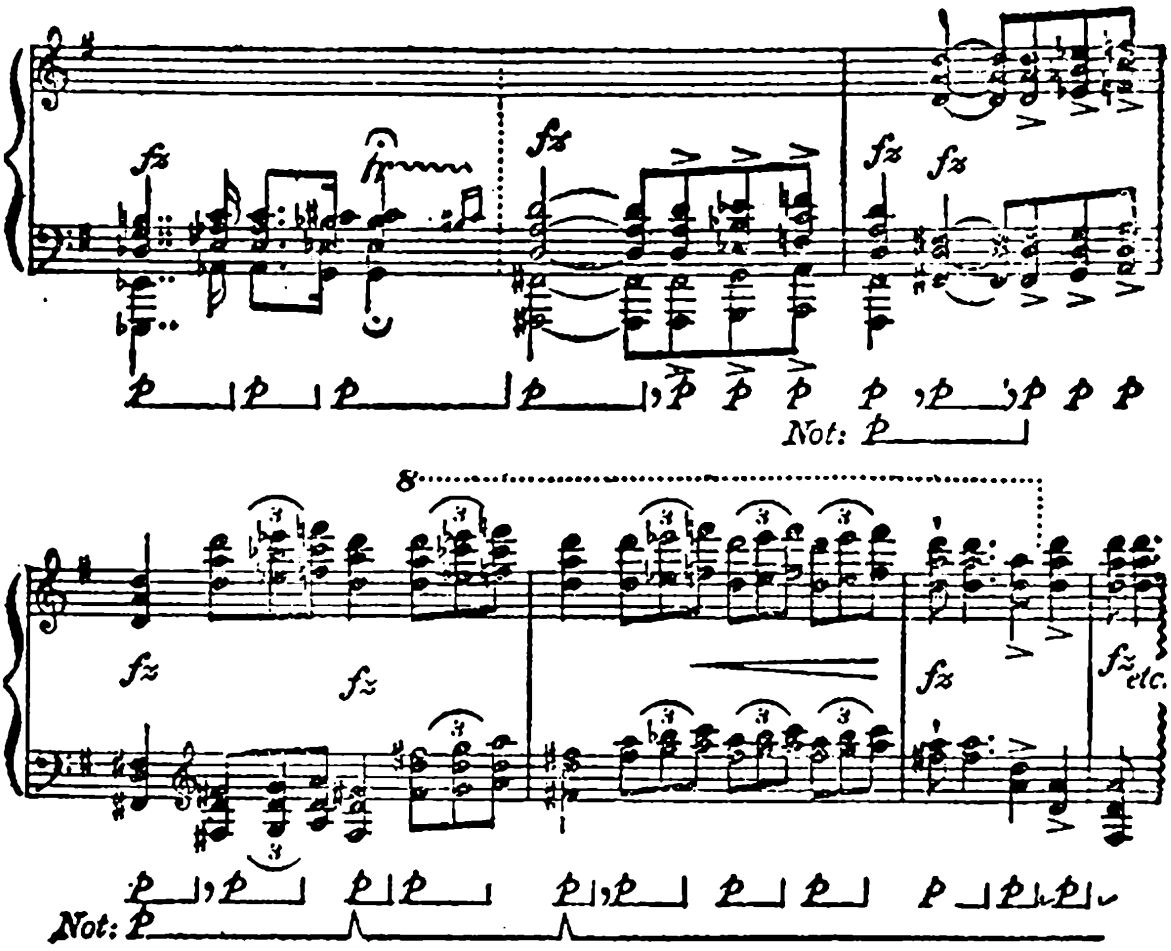


From A. C. Mackenzie's "Scottish Concerto."[1]

EXAMPLE 90.

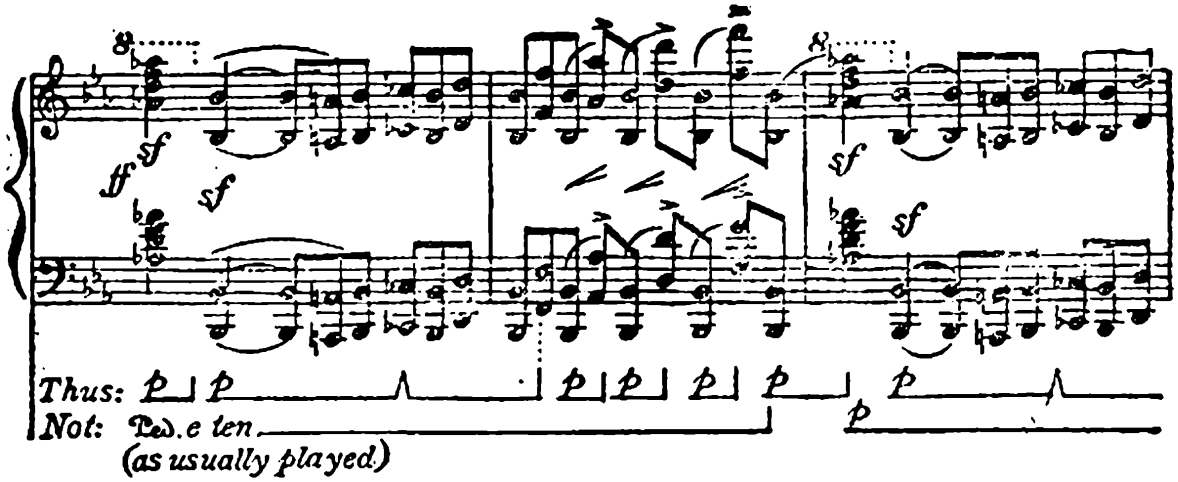


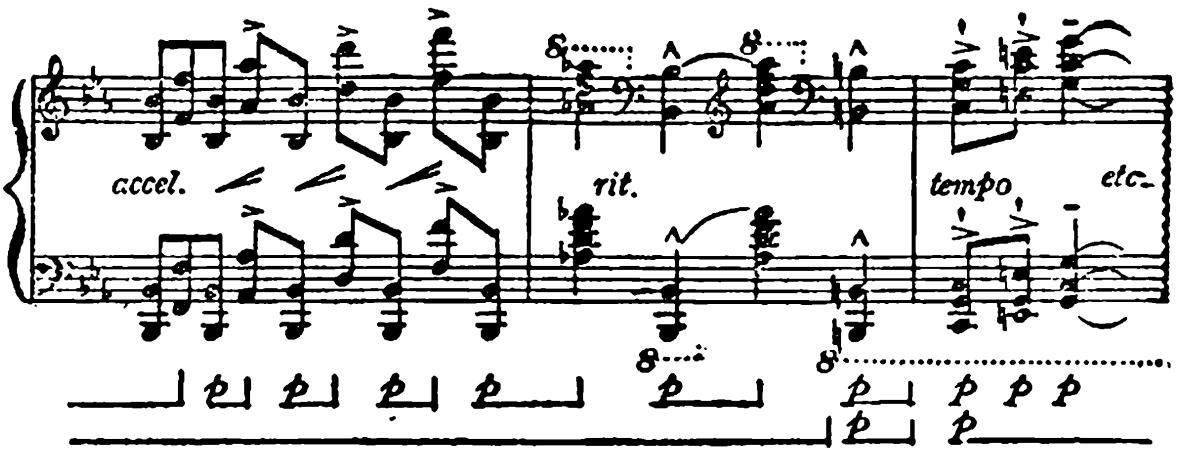
[1] By kind permission of the composer.



From Liszt's Concerto in E flat.

EXAMPLE 91.





Indeed, quite an extraordinary number of distinct effects can be produced, simply by careful foot-cessations, if only we give the requisite study to this important matter which it so urgently needs, and closely attend — and listen — to Duration *all the time* we are playing and studying, and are Teaching.[1]

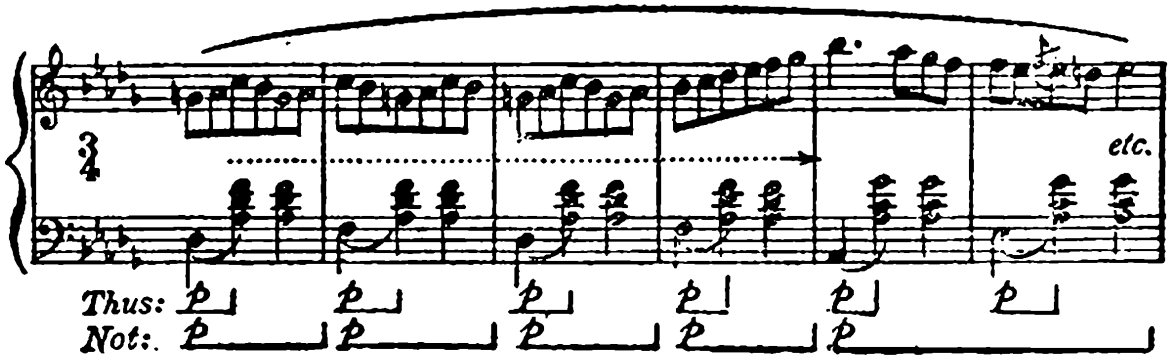
Imperative to listen accurately and constantly to duration.

Let me give you a few further examples bearing on these points. For varieties of short basses:

Various additional pedalling examples.

From D flat Waltz, Chopin.
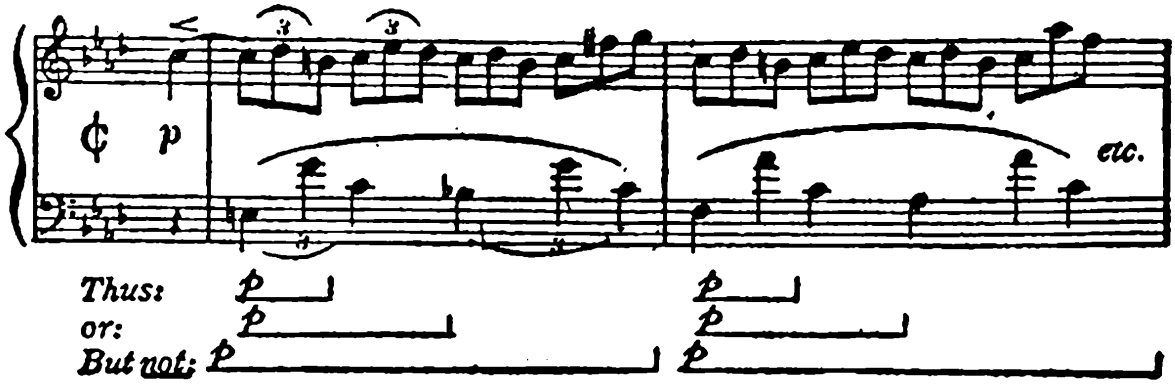
EXAMPLE 92.



[1] While it is not accurate to assert (as has been done by an enthusiast on his first beginning to realise the potency of Pedalling) that "Seventy-five per cent of good playing is correct pedalling," it is imperative to recognise that *bad pedalling* (and inaccuracy in Duration-values generally) will indeed only too easily ruin "75%" — and much more — of ones playing!

From F minor study, Chopin.

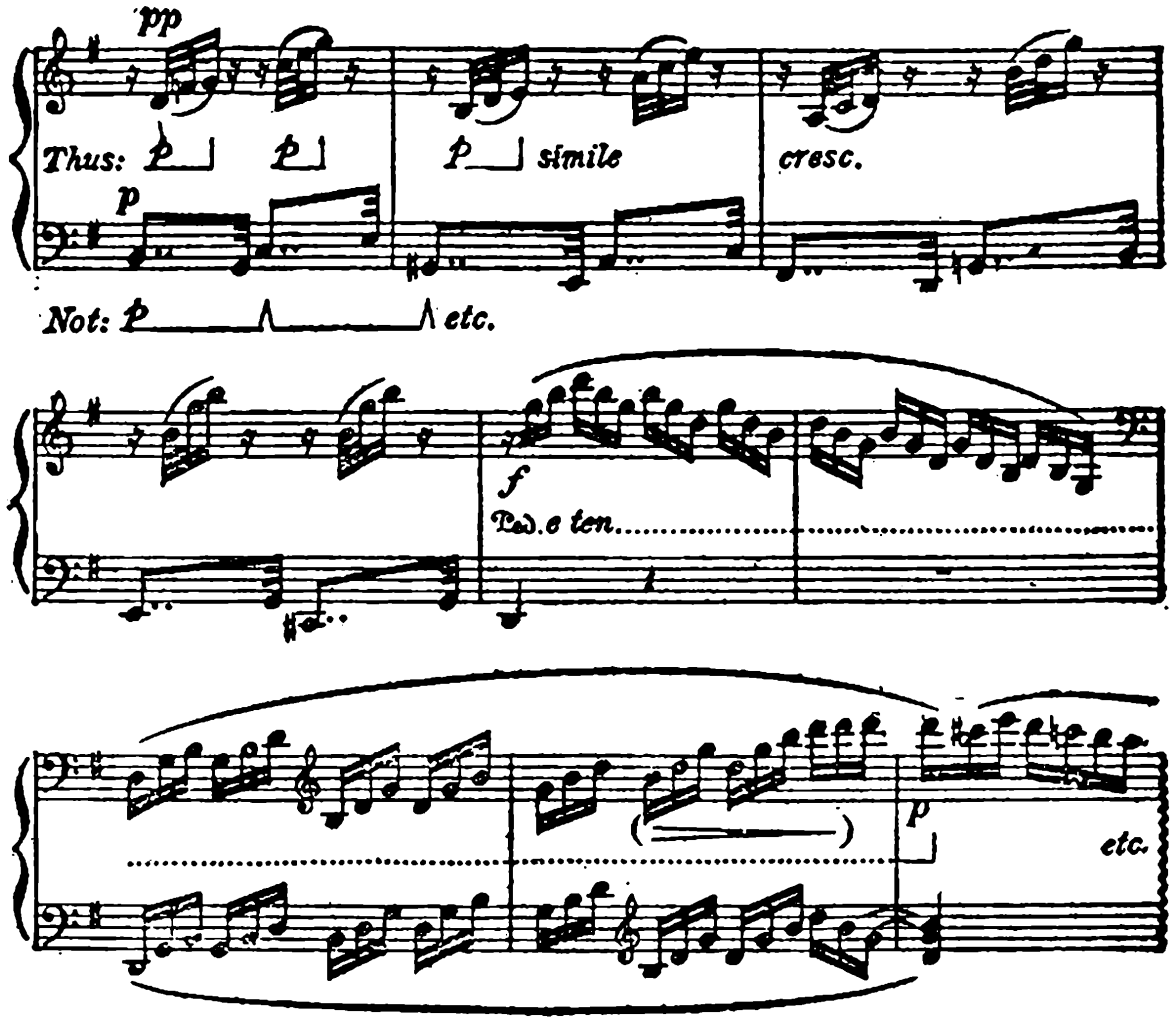
EXAMPLE 93.



To give the "feathery" effect to the little arpeggio in the right hand:

From Beethoven's Rondo in G.
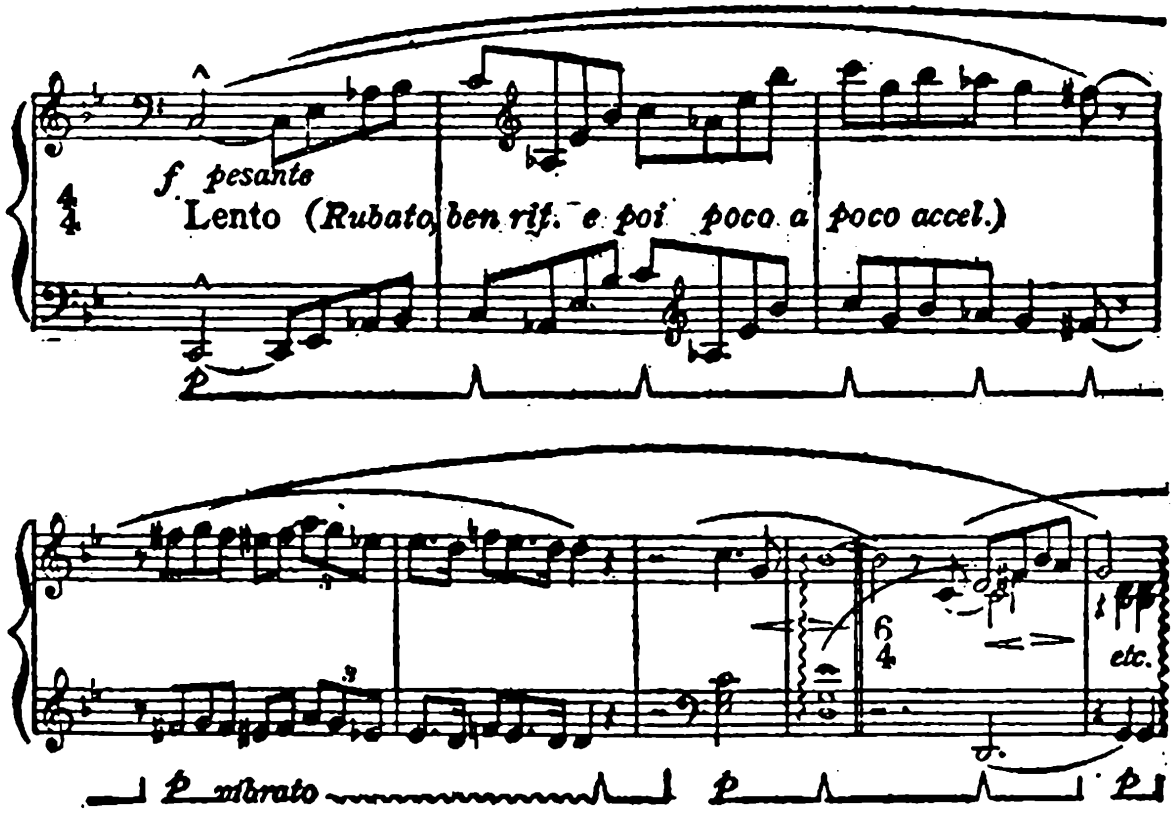
EXAMPLE 94.



As examples of "half-pedalling" or "half-damping":

From G minor Ballade, Chopin.

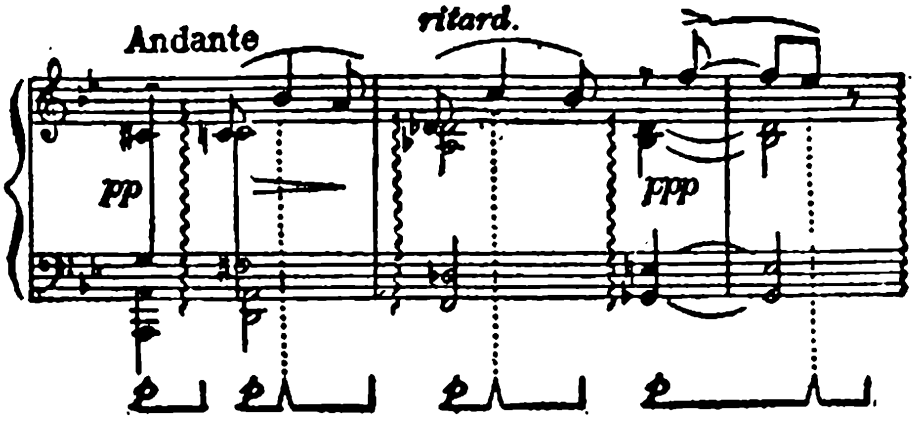
EXAMPLE 95.



Remember the *Note* as to Chopin's pedalling, page 89!

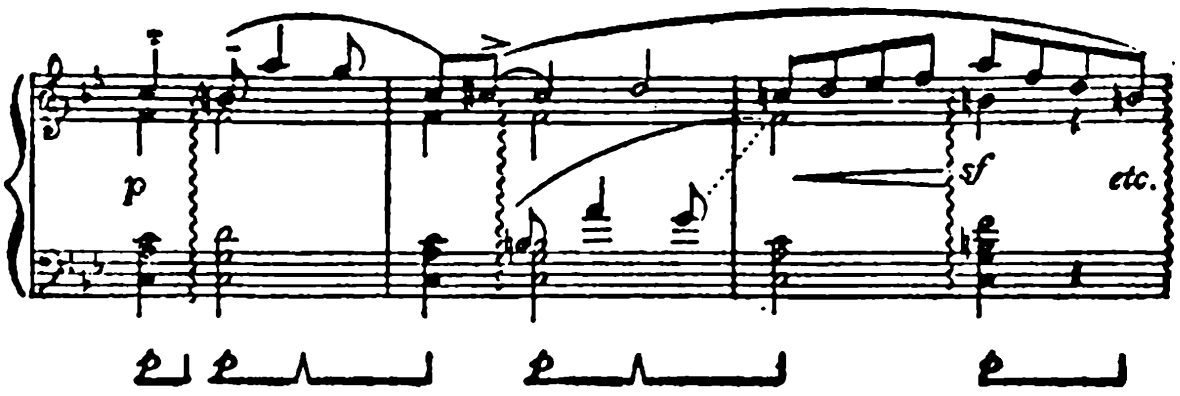
From Albumblad in B-flat, Grieg.

EXAMPLE 96*a*.



And from the same little piece:

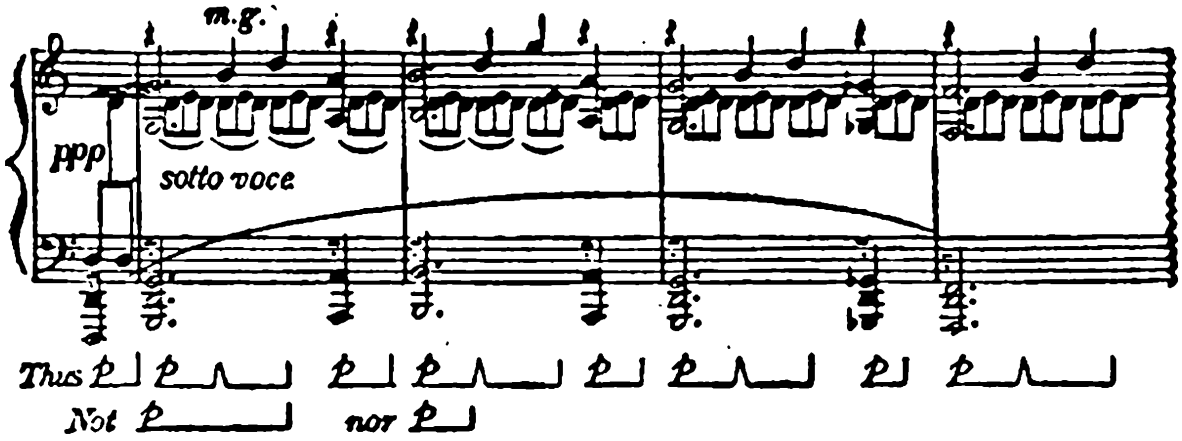
EXAMPLE 96*b*.



As an example of many similar half-pedalling effects required in Brahms:

Episode from Rhapsody in G minor, Brahms.

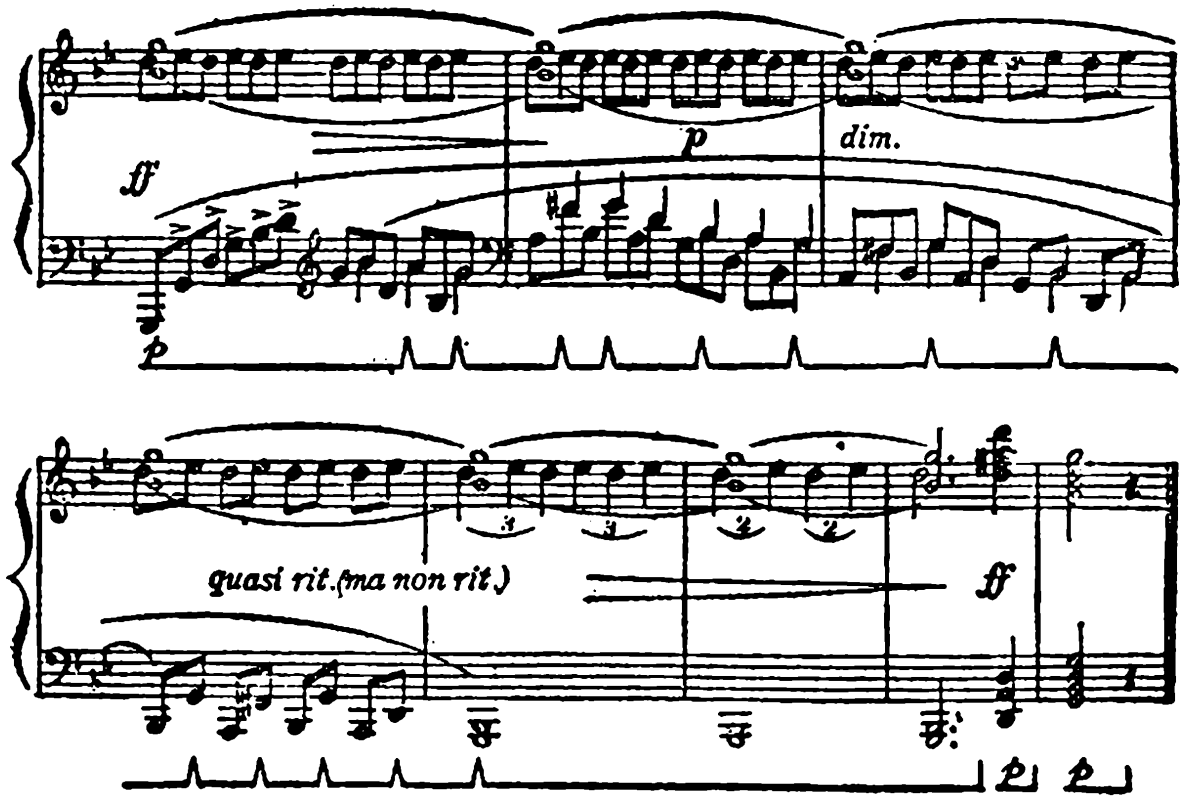
EXAMPLE 97*a*.



The impressive effect of this passage would be lost were the Bass pedalled *legato*. Sustaining the pedal to the *third* beat would still sound clumsy; hence the only solution is to "half-pedal" at the *second* beat, and to make a complete break before the fourth beat, as notated.

Coda from the same Rhapsody.

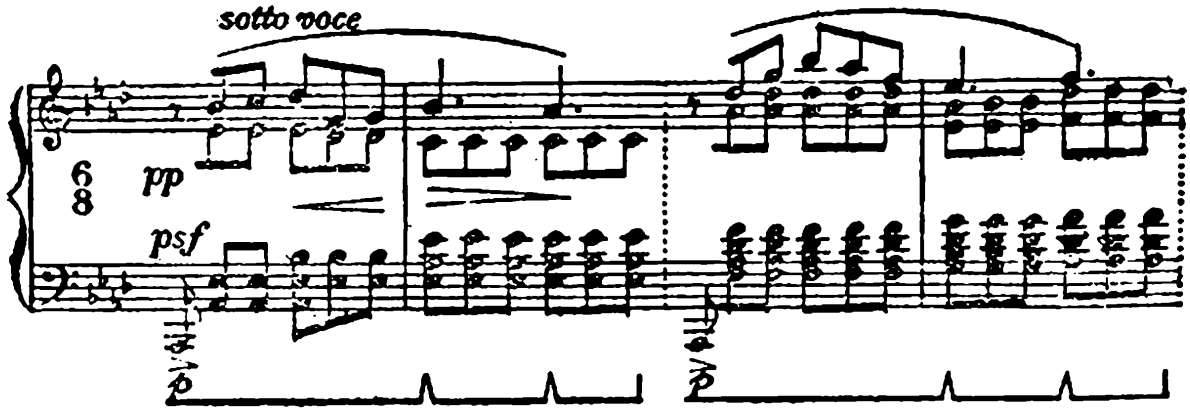
EXAMPLE 97*b*.



Chopin also well understood this effect:

From Coda of Prelude in A flat, Chopin.

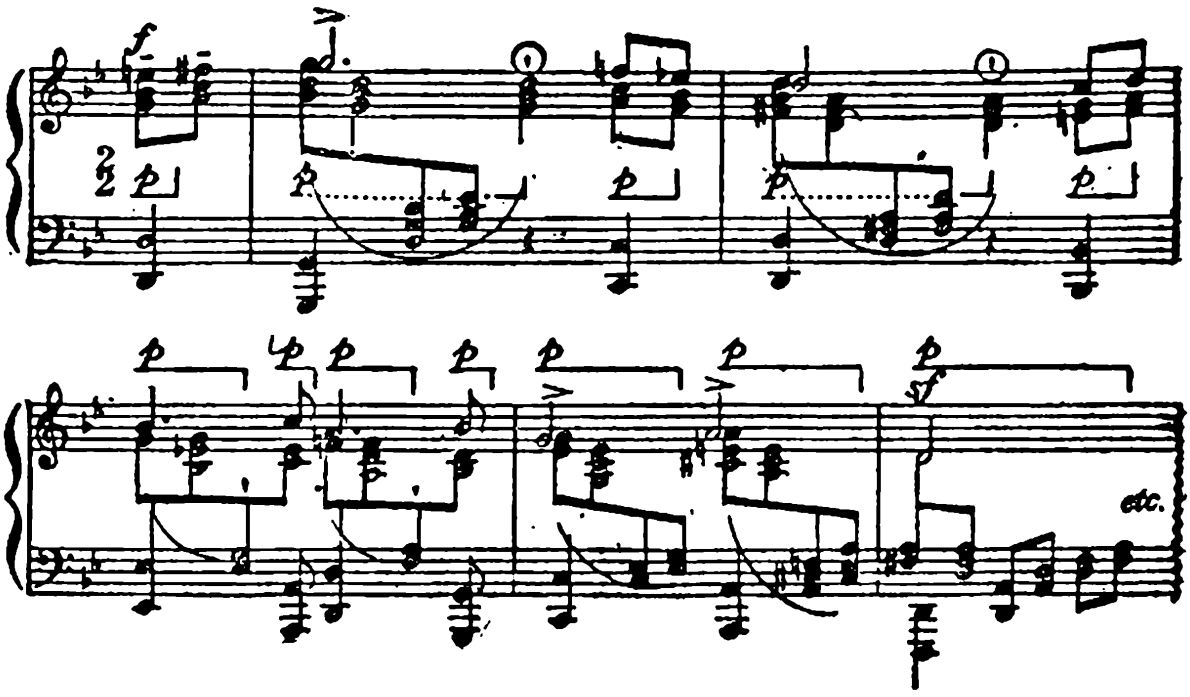
EXAMPLE 98.



As an example of Cessation-emphasis:
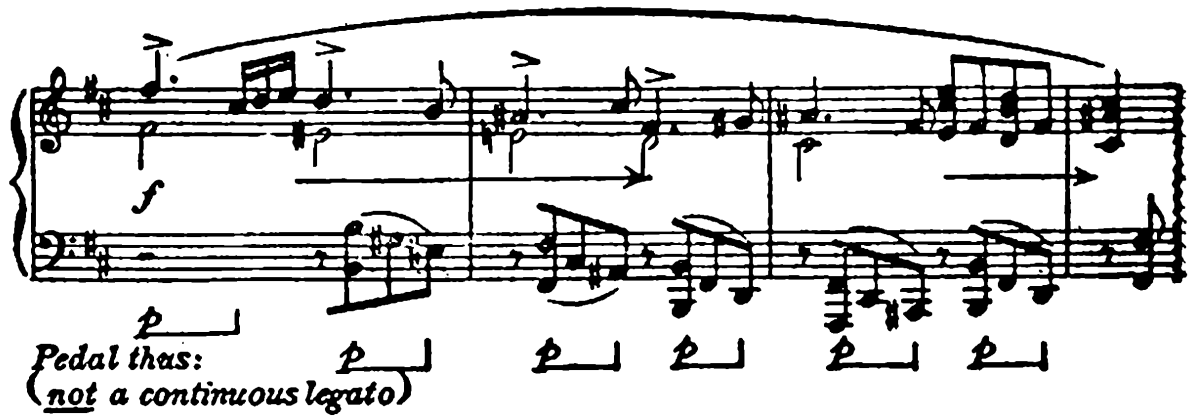
Ballade from Op. 118, Brahms.

EXAMPLE 99.



Finally, the lecturer (to show varieties of Pedal-effect) played some pages of Brahms' Rhapsody in B minor:

EXAMPLE 100.



Listen both to finger and foot doings.

I think I have shown you enough to convince you how imperative it is not only to "listen with your fingers," as the empiric phrase has it (and a very useful old empiric

phrase it is) but also, that you must strive to "listen" just as accurately, definitely, and purposefully with *your foot.*[1]

It is not a complex problem at all if we only cease making distinctions which do not really exist! Be it right hand or left hand, or any finger-tip of either, or be it our right foot, they are all but part of us — part of our body, why then delude ourselves into considering them to be separate "things"? *All* are able to send sense-impressions to our brain from resistances experienced outside our bodies, and all must help in providing the required effects.

Attention during performance.

Evidently, whether we touch the piano (and act upon it) with a finger or a foot, it is always "*we*" — ourselves, who are thus deriving impressions from the instrument (the piano itself) and ordering actions outside of us (and within us) in consequence. Why then have bits of "we," a right hand bit, or a left hand bit, or a foot bit? Instead of all such distinctions, let us thoroughly realise that we must all the time be keenly alert to what our sensation-apparatus *as a whole* conveys to us from the Piano, so that we may properly order and *time* the musical and muscular *doing.* The sensation of KEY-RESISTANCE and the sensation of PEDAL-RESISTANCE, these are both but part and parcel of that single thought and purpose, summed up as "performing-attention" — and that means: *attention to Music* — THROUGH OUR INSTRUMENT.

[1] Foot and Finger together make up the musical effect we need, therefore do not let us separate these into distinct and often *conflicting* departments, but let them always act in consonance, indeed as one person. At the piano, we must know no distinction or separateness between our right and left hands, neither may we make these distinct from our *right* Foot.